

POSTAL NEWS

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TECHNOLOGY NEWS

1. Irvine's Quantum Fuel Systems inks deal with U.S. Postal Service

Firm will develop advanced electric delivery vehicle for federal agency.

By Tamirra Stewart Published: February 04, 2010 12:36 PM

Irvine-based Quantum Fuel Systems Technologies Worldwide was selected by the U.S. Postal Service to develop an advanced electric delivery vehicle based on the Long Life Vehicle platform.

Quantum is among four other companies that will participate in a one-year trial run in Washington, D.C., that could pave the way to widespread adoption of battery electric vehicles in the agency's fleet. Quantum will integrate its Quantum Quiet high-efficiency battery electric drive system into a Grumman LLV, the Postal Service's delivery trucks.

“We are excited to have the opportunity to demonstrate the performance, efficiency and reliability of Quantum’s Quiet electric drive system to the U.S. Postal Service,” says Alan Niedzwiecki, president and CEO of the firm.

The frequent stops of the postal vehicles during short-range mail routes make them the ideal application for battery electric-powered systems.

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2. U.S. Postal Service Expands Greeting Card Retail Network

By Ina Steiner

AuctionBytes.com

February 05, 2010

Reading AuctionBytes: U.S. Postal Service Expands Greeting Card Retail Network

The U.S. Postal Service is expanding its test of greeting card sales from 500 offices to about 900. Busy consumers can buy, stamp and mail a greeting card while conducting

other Postal Service business under this year-long pilot program launched last fall. By the end of March about 1,500 locations will offer cards.

Offering greeting cards on a limited basis serves as a market test to determine if customer interest is high enough to warrant expanding the program throughout the country, according to Robert Bernstock, president, Mailing and Shipping Services.

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3. Japan's government bonds face a shaky long-term outlook

By Michiyo Nakamoto in Tokyo

Published: February 4 2010 02:00 | Last updated: February 4 2010 02:00

As concerns about the risks of global sovereign debt swirl through the markets, Shizuka Kamei, Japan's financial services minister, has added to the anxiety with comments that have sparked fears that one of the world's most indebted countries could face a drop in demand for its debt.

Within days of Standard & Poor's sounding the alarm over Japan's fiscal health, by warning that it might lower Japan's credit rating, Mr Kamei raised eyebrows by calling for one of the largest buyers of Japanese government bonds - Japan Post Bank - to buy more US Treasuries and corporate bonds instead.

The FSA minister, who is preparing measures to encourage savers to put more of their money into post office accounts, suggested that this additional inflow could be invested in non-JGB assets.

"We would like to diversify [the postal bank's] investments," he said. Mr Kamei's stance has been greeted with bafflement.

"I am . . . shocked by his comments," says Allan Bedwick, who runs a global macro fund at OGI Capital Partners in Tokyo.

By making such comments, Mr Kamei "runs a serious risk of spooking the domestic investment community", which buys the bulk of JGBs, he says.

Japan's dire fiscal health has been a cause for concern for some time. With a weak economy and ageing society, gross Japanese government debt is creeping relentlessly towards 200 per cent of GDP.

Those who worry about Japan's debt mountain point out that the savings rate has been declining for decades and could soon turn negative as the population ages. This will lower the banks' ability to take on more JGBs, just as the government needs to issue more debt to cover its ballooning budget deficit.

The finance ministry forecasts that new bond issuance of Y44,300bn (\$487m) in fiscal 2010 will rise to Y55,300bn in 2013. Thus the idea that the postal bank, which holds about a quarter of outstanding JGBs, might diversify its investments is not a comforting thought.

"They don't have to start selling, they just have to stop buying and it would have a huge effect on the market," says Mr Bedwick.

Nevertheless, many analysts, including Mr Bedwick, do not expect a crisis any time soon.

Deposit-taking banks, including the postal bank, held 42.5 per cent and insurance companies another 20 per cent of outstanding JGBs at the end of September last year. Foreigners owned just 5.8 per cent, according to Ministry of Finance data.

Japanese financial institutions are likely to continue to support the JGB market because they have no other choice, many analysts say.

Japanese household savings - that is, disposable income minus consumption - are increasing. The weak economy has meant corporations are also saving, rather than investing and bank lending has been shrinking. As a result, domestic banks "have more and more cash to buy JGBs", Mr Bedwick says.

Under international capital rules, JGBs have a zero risk rating, which means banks will continue to want to hold JGBs, adds Kyohei Morita, chief economist at Barclays Capital in Tokyo.

Ironically, in spite of an ageing population, the high level of government debt will force future generations to reduce consumption and save more, says Takahide Kiuchi, economist at Nomura in Tokyo. This will, in turn, spur deflation, keeping rates low in a vicious cycle, he says.

Nobody denies that the combination of a high level of debt and grim economic growth prospects is worrying. But widespread complacency about Japan's fiscal situation could be the biggest cause for concern, says one hedge fund manager.

"The consensus is overwhelmingly that this is a disaster waiting to happen but it's not going to happen yet, which is probably the single most convincing factor that it will happen sometime sooner rather than later," he says.

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4. What are the benefits of using post office boxes?

POSTED: February 2, 2010

Get your mail when and where you want it. Postal customers value the security, privacy, and flexibility of a Post Office Box for many reasons:

It's easy to find.

It's private.

It's affordable.

It's permanent.

It's convenient.

Your home or office address may change, but your PO Box address stays the same. You can choose a location close to work or home-whatever fits your needs. Most Post Offices have extended business hours and/or 24-hour lobby access.

Each Post Office has a variety of box sizes to choose from-depending on the anticipated volume of mail you will be receiving. You don't have to visit your local Post Office to rent a box, you can search online at usps.com/poboxes by address or ZIP code for an available PO Box. It shows available sizes and fees for a location near you. You can make one-time payments for your box rental with a credit card or sign up for automatic payment.

If you won't be able to get to the Post Office for an extended period of time, you can make arrangements for your mail to be held. Two box keys are issued free to the boxholder; additional keys are available at a nominal fee.

For more information about purchasing stamps, stamps by mail, postal regulations, a free subscription to USA Philatelic magazine, Post Office events, the location of the nearest postal store or contract unit, or for answers to your specific Postal Service questions, contact USPS at 1-800-275-8777, or visit www.usps.com. To schedule a presentation for your community, club or group on how the Postal Service brings the Post Office to your home or office computer, call 239-573-9638.

Mr. Zip's Tip: The Postal Service moves mail using planes, trains, trucks, cars, boats, ferries, helicopters, subways, flat planes, hovercrafts, T-3s, street cars, mules, bicycles and human feet.

An independent federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that visits every address in the nation 146 million homes and businesses. It has 37,000 retail locations and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to pay for operating expenses, not tax dollars. The Postal Service has annual revenues of \$75 billion and delivers nearly half the world's mail.

5. The Art of Letter Writing – Time to Go Postal

2010-02-02 18:03:28 - As the iPad threatens to revolutionise the book industry, is it time for the Luddites to revolt?

For those who love the art of letter writing, enough is enough. The release of the iPad could transform the way we read books as the e-book looks set to take off. Already letter writing is in decline thanks to the prevalence of email and social networking sites like Facebook. Writing a letter and sticking it in a square envelope takes thought and effort. But that's the point. Unlike being 'poked' on Facebook, receiving a handwritten envelope in the post is extra special. It shows that someone has really put care, love and attention into their writing.

Increasingly it's hard to find square envelopes and official letter paper outside of an office environment. But the ancient skill of letter writing could soon become a valuable sought after skill. Letter writing is the art form beloved of poets, romantics, rock stars, and of course grandmas. The old saying 'you won't miss it until its gone' is beginning to make itself felt for those of us who only receive the odd bill or unwanted junk mail in the post.

Snail mail has a charm all of its own that can't be replicated in an email. In the same way many believe physical books have a power that e-books could never match thanks to their physicality. For those who still cling to the art of letter writing, there can be no greater joy than a square envelope plopping gently on the doormat. Letters are a cherished means of personal contact but they are on the decline – back in 2005-2006, the Royal Mail first felt the hit when its profits from letters fell by a third.

Where do you keep your Basildon Bond writing paper and stock of square envelopes? The letter it seems is fading quickly but before you boot up the laptop to put together a speedy email consider this: The epistolary novel will become extinct, old school fan mail to rock stars or actors will disappear, and of course there's one kind of letter that will never find a suitable e-replacement – the old fashioned love letter. Perhaps letter writing and envelope sales will be a little more resistant to the threat of extinction than the technology buffs think.

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